

The Balkans: Recommendations for the Next Administration

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, not only for this opportunity to testify once again but also for your decades of commitment to Europe whole and free. But the job is not yet finished. Problems remain between Serbia and Kosovo as well as inside Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Serbia is also a factor.

The essential precondition for solving the remaining Balkan problems is American recommitment to the region, in tandem with European allies. Recent competition between the US and EU, which has shown it cannot do the job on its own, hampered progress. As part of its global re-assertion of democratic values, ***President Biden should consult the Europeans, especially Germany and the UK, and announce a joint vision for the Balkan region.***

Completing Kosovo statehood

Independent Kosovo is still completing its statehood. Its security forces are progressing toward NATO. Other sovereign institutions are also gaining capability but lack universal recognition.

The Pristina/Belgrade dialogue the EU hosts can help but needs more US support. ***The Americans should insist that the over-riding principles governing the dialogue be reciprocity and implementation.*** The EU and US need a constant monitoring mechanism, including of past agreements. Reciprocity should include extension of the Special Chambers' mandate to crimes committed inside Serbia, including the post-war murder of three Americans.

The main US goal for the dialogue is mutual recognition and exchange of ambassadors. ***President Biden and Chancellor Merkel should make this goal explicit and press the non-recognizing EU members to declare they will recognize Kosovo no later than Serbia does.*** UN membership will require ***the Americans to convince Russia and China not to veto.***

Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia's sovereignty and territorial integrity are as fraught as Kosovo's. The Dayton accords reached 25 years ago entailed territorial division and ethnic power-sharing, ending a terrible war. That formula no longer makes sense for the international community, which pays many of Bosnia's bills, or for its citizens, who suffer dysfunctional governance.

Dayton today serves the interests of ethnic robber barons. One arms his statelet for secession while another eggs him on and the third complains. ***The US should press the Europeans to sanction those who advocate Republika Srpska independence and to strengthen and reposition their troops, visibly backed by the US, to the northeastern town of Brcko, to block secession. The US should block excessive Russian arming of entity police as well as Croatian and Serbian political interference.***

Europe and the US want a post-Dayton Bosnia that can qualify for EU membership. That Bosnia will be based not on ethnic power-sharing but rather on majorities of citizens electing their representatives. The cantons and entities, as well as ethnic vetoes and restrictions, will disappear. ***The Americans and Europeans should welcome the prospect of a new, civic constitution.***

No one outside Bosnia and Herzegovina can reform its constitution. A popular movement is needed. ***The United States, along with the Europeans, needs to protect that popular movement from repression while starving the entities of funding and redirecting it to the central government and municipalities.***

Redirecting Serbia

Everything I've suggested will be easier if Serbia helps. President Trump allowed President Vucic to tighten control of Serbian courts and news media, which often indulge in hate speech, and to promote pan-Serb ambitions destabilizing to Bosnia, Kosovo, and Montenegro. ***The Biden Administration will need to toughen up on Belgrade, together with Europe.*** If Vucic continues to prefer autocracy and alignment with Russia and China, ***the Europeans and Americans will need to find opportunities to hasten the day Serbia is committed to real democracy at home and better relations with its neighbors.*** To get a good deal we need to be ready to walk away from a bad one. Serbia's citizens, more concerned about jobs than Kosovo or Bosnia, need to make their preferences known.

Conclusion

President Biden will have bigger problems than the Balkans. But few regions promise better returns. Cooperating with Europeans, the US can save the sovereignty and territorial integrity of two potential allies—Kosovo and Bosnia—and help Serbia escape its legacy of autocracy and war. ***President Biden should support those prepared to make Europe whole and free and counter those who block progress.***